

Advocates Push For Labels To Protect Kids From Choking

Congressman Pushes Choking-Prevention Bill

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WASHINGTON -- Hot dogs, popcorn and candy are all treats for many kids -- but they can also be deadly.

WBAL-TV 11 News Washington Bureau Chief Peter Barnes reported that a Washington consumer group is pushing for special safety labels on packages of certain foods to warn parents of choking hazards.

Dozens of kids die from choking on food each year. Now some members of Congress want to do something about it.

In November 2000, Eric Adler was enjoying a family birthday party. Four months later, the 4-year-old from New Jersey died from choking on a hot dog. His mother, Joan, said she didn't know hot dogs could choke young children.

"Eric choked and his life ended. Now every day, my family and I wrestle with the unbearable pain of never seeing or holding Eric again," Joan Adler said.

About 70 children die in the United States each year from choking on food. It's the fourth highest cause of accidental death among young kids, Barnes reported.

Now Congress is considering new legislation to order the Food and Drug Administration to study choking food risks and, if necessary, force food manufacturers to put warning labels on hot dogs, candy and other risky foods.

"We want to ensure that the FDA has the tools it needs to provide effective oversight of foods, especially those marketed towards children," Rep. Mike Honda, D-California, said.

Honda introduced the same bill last year, but it died when the House didn't act on it. The congressman said that this year, he'll work harder at it, but the food industry is against it and the industry is pretty powerful when it comes to lobbying.

Some food companies already voluntarily label some foods with warnings. But the Center for Science in the Public Interest and child advocates said many others don't, which could be deadly for kids.

"If an object obstructs their airway, they're at greater risk because their trachea is so small," Children's National Medical Center representative Elizabeth Edgerton said.

Food manufacturers said the legislation is unnecessary, that labels won't prevent accidental choking, and that parent supervision and public education about food hazards will prevent the incidents.

Officials suggest that if you are barbecuing hot dogs for young kids, don't just cut them up. Instead, slice the hot dogs lengthwise into quarters and then cut them up into small pieces.

Last week, a state judge in California awarded \$50 million to a family of 2-year-old child who died after choking on candy.

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